

Law Firm Business Development: Nailing the Fundamentals

By [LawVision](#) on May 19, 2016

It is one of the simplest yet often hardest questions to answer— *“What do you do?”* Having a crisp answer can often be the difference between making a connection with a client to help them solve a problem, or a wasted opportunity to develop new business or grow a relationship.

When clients ask this question, what they are really asking is *“what problem do you solve?”* Or, *“under what circumstance would I need to hire you?”*

If done correctly, developing a pithy explanation of what you do certainly brings clarity to a client who is asking the question to learn more about for which project they might hire you. Plus, it will help a lawyer with the important task of putting themselves in their clients’ shoes and understanding from their perspective why clients hire them.

Essentially, developing a response to this question helps a lawyer to develop their own personal value proposition. If this value proposition is articulated in terms of what problems a lawyer solves and the circumstances whereby a client can benefit from the lawyer’s experience, it will help them differentiate themselves and stay top-of-mind with the client.

Having a crisp explanation of what problems you solve has an equally important added benefit internally at the law firm. It helps a lawyer’s busy colleagues better understand when and how to introduce them to their clients to help with cross-selling.

So understanding the importance of being able to articulate crisply what you do, why do lawyers often struggle with the concept? I think there are three basic causes:

1. **It is difficult.** It takes time to synthesize your experience and related expertise into a simple sentence or two that positions you as a problem-solver of certain issues that clients face.
2. **It can make one feel vulnerable.** Having to sell oneself is the new reality. Lawyers need to be able to generate their own demand and collaborate with their colleagues to grow client relationships. In order to do this effectively, they have to be able to explain what kinds of problems they solve.
3. **Lawyers don’t always know how or where to begin.** With lots of competing demands on a lawyer’s time, it is easy to put off planning for selling and to focus on existing work and demands instead.

Whether it is with the internal business development function, or an outside consultant, helping lawyers articulate how specifically they can help clients, what problems they solve and the benefits the clients receive from the lawyer’s services, is incredibly valuable.

Here is one simple approach I often take with the lawyers I work with to help them clarify the value they can offer to a client.

1. What is the business **issue** that the client faces that I can help with? Be as crisp and specific as possible.
2. What is the **action** that I take in response to that issue? Cite what relevant and specific experience you will also leverage in response to the issue.

3. What is the business **benefit** and **value** that the client receives as a result of my performing that activity?

The next time you get invited to a client event, pitch or a client meeting where someone might ask you, “*what do you do?*” be prepared ahead of time with a way that demonstrates you took the time to anticipate the needs of those clients by having developed a tailored response. This will help differentiate you from your competitors who may be at the same event.

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